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# STOP *the* STRIKE!

## A PLEA FOR INDUSTRIAL PEACE

By F. H. ROSE, M.P.

With a Foreword by  
The Right Hon. J. R. CLYNES, M.P.

*NOTE.*—Some portions of this pamphlet have appeared in the column of the "Daily Mail Year-Book 1920," "The Clarion," and the "Westminster Gazette," to the Editors of which publications the author's grateful acknowledgments are due.

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IN ALL GOOD FAITH AND FELLOWSHIP,  
TO MY FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES  
OF THE PARLIAMENTARY  
LABOUR PARTY

*Happy he whose inward ear  
Angel comfortings can hear  
O'er the rabble's laughter :  
And while hatred's faggots burn,  
Glimpses through the smoke discern  
Of the great hereafter.*

*Knowing well that never yet  
Share of truth was ever set  
In the world's wide fallow :  
After hands shall sow the seed,  
After hands, o'er hill and mead,  
Reap the harvest yellow.*

*Thus—with something of the seer—  
Must the moral pioneer  
From the future borrow :  
Clothe the waste with dreams of grain  
And on midnight's sky of rain  
Paint the golden morrow.*

*J. C WHITTIER,*



# FOREWORD

By the Right Hon. J. R. CLYNES, M.P.

A WORKMAN who may have felt in his own experience that the strike is the only effective weapon for making his conditions any better, may get very angry on reading some of the paragraphs in these pages. We who know Mr. Rose recognise his frankness as all the greater proof of his friendship for workmen, and of his genuine desire to turn the forces of our social system in just that quarter which will be of the greatest benefit to the working classes. His aim is not so much to discredit the strike weapon as to show the way to a better one, and use the authority and influence which workmen now possess for the making of laws which will render strikes unnecessary and yield to the wage-earner a far better result than these struggles with employers are now able to produce.

By inference and argument this is a pungent plea for political effort and a proof that strikes are a costly and clumsy means for attaining an end which can be reached on less expensive and more scientific lines. The author is qualified by both experience and service to reveal the weakness which now often troubles the Labour Movement,

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and he sees clearly that there is " no bright future for political labour with the entangling impediments of down-tools in its path."

With the best will in the world great masses of men in striving for just ends may use the worst means to attain them, and the lessons of progress in so many other branches of national advancement should not be wasted upon Labour. These lessons should teach us that new and better instruments can be used for industrial and social betterment, and men who have suffered severely from the losses which strikes usually impose, can learn something from this stimulating contribution to the discussion of one of our greatest national problems.

# STOP *the* STRIKE

## AN ADDRESS TO THE WORKERS

*By* FRANK H. ROSE

**T**O harmonise our industrial relations upon a substantial and permanent basis is the task of high statecraft to-day. Upon its achievement depends the well-being of our own state and the progress of civilisation itself. More deterrent to human prosperity than even military war are the social ravages of industrial conflict. Strikes and lockouts in the nineteenth century cost Britain more than all the wars of the same period.

Men of all shades of opinion, from the Socialist to the most conservatively minded reactionary, are practically agreed that intensive production can alone save the world from catastrophe ; yet talk of intensive production is mere babble as long as the strike, or even its shadow, darkens our vision and encumbers our common path.

It is neither the time nor the subject for recrimination, and it is not my intention in these pages to confuse an urgent issue by a resentful or an uncharitable word. I am making an appeal to reason, and if I cannot

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compel agreement or conviction, I can at least hope to challenge thought and invoke an intelligent consideration.

Personal experience, as a responsible official of the great engineers' union during the lockout of 1896-97, brought its lesson to me, and since that day I have been an unwavering advocate for the substitution of industrial arbitration for the brutal and effete instrument of "down tools." For some years I had the co-operation of Mr. Ben Tillett, of whose courageous and able work in the Trade Union Congress I cannot speak too highly or too gratefully. But the insidious propaganda of Industrial Syndicalism, beginning in this country about 1910, effected a sudden stampede amongst that section of the workers who had inclined to reasoned and rational methods. They fell away, some to indifference and doubt, some to open hostility. The teaching of Syndicalism is easily and briefly defined. Its first aim is to disrupt and destroy the Constitutional Political Movement. Political action is declared to be useless and hopeless; the strike, sectional or general, is the sole instrument by which the capitalist is to be forced from the control of production and the workers of each industry are to own and control all industrial services.

Mr. Tillett's defection from the Arbitration

Movement was not a little puzzling. He told me personally that it was because he saw that it was out of square with working-class sentiment at that time, but that does not seem very convincing to me. That is just the time and those the circumstances which would demand additional fidelity to what one must consider as an honest conviction. There is, however, plenty of room in the thinned ranks, and a warm welcome from those of us who have kept the flag aloft in good and evil repute. And the time has come.

#### COLD SCRUTINY.

If we leave out of consideration, as we well may, that particular form of down-tools offensive generally known and understood as direct action, or the use of the industrial strike to effect political ends, and take account only of the purely industrial strike for the purpose of effecting industrial betterment, the case is simpler, but not less damning.

I am not approaching this phase of the question in a cynical mood ; nor have I the least disposition to stigmatise Syndicalism as dishonest or even disingenuous. But workers must at least cultivate a sense of proportion and remember that Organised

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Labour, all told, is but a fraction of the active occupied population of the United Kingdom. The highest paper strength of Trade Unionism is six and a half millions ; while there must be considerably over twenty millions of occupied persons in the land.

But six and a half millions is certainly an over-estimate. It would puzzle the compilers of these grandiose statistics to demonstrate that there are many more than four and a half millions of strike "effectives." Even if we admit that Organised Labour amounts to one-fourth of our working population, or one-tenth of the total population, we have still to find a defence for conditions which justify a minority of such dimensions claiming the right to inflict injury or the fear of injury upon an entire community.

This is at least a question of democratic principle, but it is capable of extension by fact. The current statement that gives Trade Unionism credit for six and a half millions of adherents should be examined more closely. I admit that it is impossible to arrive at exact figures or, indeed, to get nearer the truth than intelligent conjecture can determine. Still, the admitted non-effective element is much larger than most trade unionists imagine. There are tens of thousands of paying members of unions

who are following occupations other than those covered by those unions. There are tens of thousands who belong to more than one union and who, statistically, are counted twice or thrice over in the total. Another discount must be allowed for superannuated and permanently disabled members and for colonial and foreign memberships in most of the skilled unions and some at least of the unskilled unions.

Apart from these considerations, the mass of the membership of the old craft unions is composed of men who have joined and remain in the unions for purely provident purposes, attracted by the allurement of sick, unemployed and superannuation benefits. The militant moiety of Organised Labour represents therefore the least wealthy and most precarious memberships. If, then, the militant section, chiefly represented by the Triple Alliance contingent, were unanimous and capably officered—which I venture to declare they are not—they represent nothing more than a numerically contemptible minority of Organised Labour. Consequently, it is a curiously limited field in which the strike advocacy can operate.

To all sober and reflective workers these facts have long been and still are apparent. The threats of general strikes with the object of forcing the State and the

community into submission to the will of the mandarins of Unity House or Russell Square are little better than impudent bluff, and a free community is culpably foolish to be terrorised by them.

### THE FINANCIAL ASPECT OF THE STRIKE.

I am an advocate of Industrial Arbitration—compulsory and State authorised. Yet, if the Government attempted to enforce such a principle by statute I would resolutely oppose it. I would be no party to taking from men the power to strike ; I ask men to abandon it with minds convinced by thought and reason.

The Constitutional Political Movement was projected as an alternative, not as an auxiliary, to the strike. I admit that it has not been so far a very brilliant success, but its failure is due to its departure from, rather than its adherence to, its first principle. The “strike and starve” fraternity have intimidated us, and our own want of consistency and courage has brought us into deserved contempt and discredit. Our men in Parliament are chiefly trade union officials, who know as much of industrialism as they can see through their narrow and dingy office windows—half a dozen houses on the opposite side of the street, and, sometimes,

a thin strip of the sky that vaults the greater world beyond. Their hearts are not large ; their outlook is pitifully limited. The tragedy of it all is that they are afraid of the loud-mouthed minority and have no faith in the sense and truth of the vast majority of their own people. They shrink from telling the workers the truths they ought to know, for fear the Syndicalist fanatics should abuse them.

Suppose we cut the sentiment and render the question in terms of sheer, sordid £ s. d. Nobody need bother about the lightning strike or the general strike. The first is abortive, the second impossible. Strikes of workers to effect political ends, the "direct action" trumpery which idiots jabber about while they dare not attempt to give effect to it, have no place in the world of possibilities and are alien to the heart and mind of the British worker. The inevitable tendency is towards big things in Trade Unionism and strikes in proportion.

But the basic conditions do not change in the least. Contemporary Trade Unionism is a cheap thing, and *while the price of everything has gone up two or three hundred per cent., I know of not a single union which has raised its contribution by one fraction.* Thus, the newly constituted Amalgamated Engineering Union has a maximum contribution of

1s. 6d. per week, just as the A.S.E. has had for the last thirty years.

Here lies the first guarantee of failure for the strike. Assume, for the purposes of argument, that a strike does actually offer potentialities of success. Capitalism has entrenched itself in unassailable strength in finance and politics during the last few years. Its power of resistance to the strike is incalculably enhanced. Trade Unionism, for all its numerical accessions, is relatively enfeebled. The old 15s. a week strike benefit is the equivalent of no more than 5s. a week in purchasing power. The culpable folly of calling men out of the factory to starve upon a pittance which aggravates rather than relieves their poverty ought to be obvious.

If the "down-tools" creed is to make an appeal to the workers and to become in any appreciable degree an object of working class faith, the workers must be told the truth about its cost. A few pence per week, none too regularly paid (as at present), will be worse than useless.

**SIX SHILLINGS A WEEK REGULARLY PAID FOR TWELVE MONTHS WILL ONLY SUSTAIN A PAYMENT OF STRIKE BENEFIT AT THE RATE OF 60s. A WEEK FOR A MONTH.**

Under existing conditions, 60s. a week is little enough to fight on. The strike is nothing but a struggle of hunger endurance—

a fight "on the belly." The colliers, with the exception of two or three county associations, cannot pay strike benefit for more than a fortnight, at the meagre rate of 18s. or 20s. a week. The railway servants could not pay a second week. The transport workers are well-nigh penniless. Most of the smaller unions are equally badly off—or even worse. What wanton folly it is to talk of striking work unless you can make it an upstanding fight and a fight that is not to be determined by starvation !

The wealthiest of all the major unions, the A.E.U., has half of its available reserve fund ear-marked for its benevolent purposes, and its strike "available" would no more than support a strike of all its working members for six weeks.

I suggested the idea of a six shillings a week contribution to one of the most sincere and level-headed leaders of the Engineering Union (Mr. William Hutchinson) the other day, and he concurred in the general correctness of my calculation. But he very shrewdly observed that any official who seriously proposed it to the members would be hooted out of the ring.

"Our men," he said, "would never hear of it!"

I know he was right. Ask men like Sexton, Ben Tillett, or Thorne, how they think their

people would take it. They will tell you that "Our men cannot afford it!"

That is precisely my point. But they would not pay it if they could afford it. Surely, if they cannot afford to pay for the strike they have no business to practise it at the expense of their wives and children, to say nothing of their fellow citizens.

Look at it all round, and observe that this money question lies at the root of our Trade Union rottenness. The Miners' Federation is a composition of about twenty County Associations, some fairly well off, some desperately poor. They never would and never will hear of a pooling of funds, even in the face of a general coal strike.

Well-known Labour leaders, to whom I have presented this view of the matter, urge that workers are not all spendthrifts, and a large percentage have something in hand. From the strikemonger's point of view these are the worst danger. I never heard of a single individual who saved money with a view of spending it upon a strike. Such men are just those who are likeliest to accept defeat terms as soon as the lack of union funds makes inroads into their savings inevitable.

Some years ago, Mr. Wadsworth, the Secretary of the Yorkshire Miners' Association, issued some statistics of five strikes

within his area. One had lasted five years, two more had lasted over three years. Adding the loss of union funds to the aggregate loss of wages in those five strikes alone, and, supposing that the strikes had all been for 6d. a shift advance and had all been won outright, it would have taken the colliers in those localities over thirty years to earn back, at the rate of 2s. 6d. a week, the money they had lost. But none of the strikes were for anything as important, and they were all lost.

There is nothing so hopeless as the strike as an uplifting agency under existing conditions. It is barely arguable that a six shillings per week contribution will make it possibly effective. But it seems to me to be worse than stupid—indeed, positively wicked—to call men from their work to certain starvation and almost certain defeat.

### THE “RIGHT TO STRIKE.”

The efficacy of the strike, under existing conditions, hardly seems to be so debateable that it will sustain a reasoned controversy. But when the question is examined upon the broader basis of principle, its claims are even more shadowy. The “Right to Strike” becomes a catch phrase, for no question of right or wrong can make a legitimate entry into the argument.

All through, we have to remember that no distortion of democratic principle can justify it. A general strike would be merely a claim on the part of one-fifth (at most) of the population to the "right" to dictate life terms to the remainder and to cause want, suffering and pain in the process to those who can have no voice or part in the conflict. That is both undemocratic and anti-social.

Nor can right or wrong become determining factors in any human struggle in which force is invoked. The "Power to Strike" is the only factor I have any intention to speak about. "God fights with the biggest battalions" may be true, but He does not fight with the biggest mobs and never has done so far as I can probe the records.

In the trade unions in which strike ballots are a constitutional practice, a two-thirds majority of those voting is the authority by virtue of which a strike can be validated. I admit that this provision is a shade better than nothing, but it is only a shade, and it does not constitute much more than a travesty of democratic principle. It takes no cognisance of the will and desire of the direct dependants of the willing strikers. Labour men have always professed to believe in political and municipal votes for women; have always and consistently urged the equality of the sexes in all matters which affect

common responsibility and common human rights and obligation. The collier's wife may be endowed with the right to vote for a member of Parliament, a Town or Parish Councillor, but the collier himself must decide the industrial issue which means to the woman and her children the heaviest share of suffering and want. Strike votes for the female adult dependants of the trade unionist is the least tribute that our sturdy democrats of Organised Labour can lay upon the shrine of Omnipotent Democracy.

When I suggest this to some of my pure-souled Labour colleagues, they scout the idea and pretend not to regard it as a serious and a considered proposal. When I ask them why, they say that the woman does not pay to the trade union. Doesn't she ? If I know anything about it—and I fancy I do—the woman pays the most and most regularly—and in more ways than is indicated by entries upon pence cards.

Then I am told that if women had strike votes, we should never have a strike at all. I am by no means sure of that, but I am sure that we should have fewer strikes and be all the better for it. What I condemn is this hypocritical lip-service to democratic principle on the part of men who in practice evade its primary obligations.

It is probable that nearly half of the trade

union force of this country are slaves of the Executive whistle. Many hold mass meetings and strike upon "show of hands" votes. As long as these slipshod methods prevail it is idle to talk of democratic sanction or the "right to strike." I hear prominent Labour officials exhorting their members to "trust your leaders!" and be ready to dumbly obey the strike call. My appeal to them is to do nothing of the sort, but to think and act for themselves and, at least, to obey nothing less authoritative than the will of a majority.

I rejoice that there are signs that this idea is steadily gaining ground in those unions in which the "follow your leader" system has been too long the vogue.

Still, there will be the question of whether any minority section of a great interdependent community should exercise the power to penalise and terrorise a majority, without sanction and without consultation. If such a condition is to have the endorsement of a free community, chatter about democratic equality is as much an insult to common sense as it is an outrage upon social law.

#### THE ANTI-SOCIAL PHASE.

The strike is the express negation of Collectivist principle, just as it is the denial of the validity of democratic faith. As long

as the power to strike is retained, the hope of a better order is vanity. I may be allowed to quote some portion of an article by the present writer in the *Daily Mail Year Book* for 1920, which expresses a view which I have seen no reason to modify since it was written.

The Syndicalist idea of the ownership and control of the industrial and productive elements by the workers of each industry is no more crazy than that of the average Labour man who somehow assumes that the nationalisation of productive and distributive elements and the right to strike are compatible. Not even a consciously Socialist Government, should one ever exist, could commandeer an industry or a public service without a preliminary guarantee that the workers engaged in such industry or service should be willing to work under such conditions and upon such terms as were ordained by the State in the common interest of the community. In a sentence, *Nationalisation shatters at a blow the strike and lock-out*, and dispels the vain dream of national industry directed by trade union officialism.

The authority of Labour must be expressed no longer by the trade union, but through the State which becomes responsible as the sole employer.

The nationalisation of the mines and the

railways are the best illustrations, because both subjects have been brought recently into the region of what is termed practical politics. The State, if it assumes the ownership of either or both of these services, assumes it at the cost and the risk of the whole nation, and in the name of the nation. It can only operate successfully with a disciplined and constant labour force. *It must control all the factors of industry, or Nationalisation is a misnomer and a sham.* That these elementary truths must be declared forcibly and fearlessly by the Labour elect is the first essential, but strangely involves a duty from which the Labour Party mandarins have rather ignobly recoiled. The advantages of Nationalisation can only be realised by the frank and consentient sacrifice of cherished industrial privileges. Labour cannot have it both ways.

If the abysmal folly of Labour's present conceptions of State ownership and control need emphasis, it is not difficult to emphasise it by a very obvious and simple analogy. The strike and the lock-out are expressions of the same principle ; the strike is the withholding of Labour from Capital, and the lock-out is the withholding of Capital from Labour. The idea of both is to enforce the domination of the one interest over the other. If the workers engaged in a nationalised industry

may strike against the State of which they are at once citizens and servants, the State may surely exercise the right to lock out the workers to enforce the terms and conditions of labour deemed to be the most convenient and right for the nation.

After all, what we term the State is but the official agency through which a democratic community governs itself. The workers in any State-owned and directed industry assume a dual character : that of common citizenship expressing civic authority through the State government which it shares in appointing, and that of communal service. If Labour strikes, or malingers, or wastes, it injures itself, both in practice and theory. If the State locks out, it makes war against the community as well as against its own servants. The position in either case is ludicrous.

It is to be feared that the average Labour leader has failed to discriminate between the essential principles of State ownership and control, and mere government and administration of the national affairs by the trade union executives. Suggestions made to the organised workers that, in the event of Nationalisation, there will be all the greater need for powerful trade unions are wrong-headed and illogical. The continuance of the orthodox trade union policy by the

workers simply means the conversion of the State departments into the equivalent of an Employers' Federation. The competitive struggle between employers and workers would be perpetuated with infinitely disastrous results all round.

### THE DOWN-TOOLS FALLACY.

If Labour is ever to become the ruling factor of the Empire it can only be when Labour has shed its delusions and relegated its obsolete and futile equipment to limbo. Labour cannot win with the strike incubus upon its back. It was a vague consciousness of this that inspired the creation of the Political Labour Movement.

A hundred years of strike effort has left the state of the worker little better, if any better, than before. Little worth having has come through its agency, and the method is at best costly, clumsy and effete. As a rule it has hurt the capitalist, against whom it is usually directed, least of all it has directly or indirectly affected.

A better way must be found, or Labour's aspiration to rule is but a fantastic illusion. It has entered men's minds upon inconsequential trifles and side-tracked them from essential things. Like military wars, industrial

wars have settled nothing. They are part and parcel of a competitive system, and as much out of square with human civilised progress as any other form of savagery and destruction.

As far as I know, the first recorded strike took place in the ancient brickfields of Egypt. It was essentially the prototype strike of all the ages. It was about straw. Its immediate result was that the employers suffered ten plagues—one a plague of lice—and the strikers got forty years in the wilderness. But the straw question has never been satisfactorily settled to this day. Most strikes, ancient and modern, run much on the same lines. The modern classic is the “Bradawl” strike of the Lancashire cardroom operatives about a dozen years ago. The facts are interesting.

It appears that at a mill in Shaw, near Oldham, a carder was either in the habit of using—or refusing to use, it matters very little which—a common bradawl for the purpose of removing the waste cotton from the wire-card flats of the carding machine. It was regarded as matter of principle on both sides. The operative leaders were eloquent about it. Sir Charles Macara, then president of the Cotton Masters' Association, was positively magnificent on the subject. Some 250,000 workers were directly involved

and a strike actually took place. It lasted but a day or two, Sir George Askwith managing to effect a tentative compromise on the promise that he would give a decision on the bradawl difficulty after consideration. That decision was never given, and most men, even operative and master cotton spinners, have forgotten it. It is true, nevertheless.

The issue at stake in the latest colliery strike is stated by the chief parliamentary spokesman of the miners, Mr. William Brace, to be as "dust in the balance." Now, as always, the greatest industrial upheavals are caused by trivialities which are mostly forgotten—just as the first ostensible cause of the late war was forgotten when more important or more popular issues were involved. The bitterest conflicts of history have been caused by disputes about inconsequential things.

Strikes are acts of war as much as military battles. The moral justification for either form of conflict is that its objective shall be worthy of attainment, and that those who engage in them shall have the fullest and most unrestricted right to determine them. Most of our Labour advocates clamour for the principle of arbitration as an alternative to the arbitrament of military war. But they vehemently resent the suggestion of

arbitration to settle such issues as straws, bradawls, or “dust in the balance.”

### PRODUCTION—OR THE STRIKE.

Humanity, having wasted five years of its substance and mortgaged the world’s wine, honey and corn for many generations to come, is poverty-stricken and well-nigh insolvent. That there is a world scarcity of goods is admitted on all hands. It is equally accepted as a truth that nothing will make scarce things cheap, and that only by making things plentiful can they be cheapened. Not even South Wales colliers or their leaders will deny these truths.

The position of the mining community is that, knowing this, they proceed to expend £2,000,000 of their union funds and lose £15,000,000 in wages to impede not only the production of their own trade, but of everybody else’s—because of a difference of opinion with the rest of the community in respect to a triviality.

Is it not somewhat gratuitous to talk of the need of intensive production under the shadow of the strike ? We cannot imaginably produce to the claim of our needs unless we stop the strike and remove the peril of the strike. Labour cannot hope for the confidence and trust of the community as

long as representative Labour men pander to it or its fomenters. Labour, in the rank-and-file sense, must learn its lesson and carry its share of the common burden.

Most, if not all, I have written will doubtless be stigmatised as "Capitalistic dope" by the dismal fraternity who have inveigled the workers into a morass from which they cannot rescue them. I am glad to know that some of them at least are trying—in, I also hope, a spirit of repentance. But it is not enough that some representative Syndicalists are changing front and endeavouring to retrace their steps. Something more convincing is needed, or we shall have to frame a less impersonal indictment.

#### THE WAY TO A BETTER ORDER.

There is no ultimate hope but in Constitutional political effort. The Geneva International has given that mandate to the workers of all the world. Robert Smillie gave the same message to the Special Trades Union Congress on October 28th. Many men, of whom I claim to be one, have proclaimed it for the last twenty-five years. We at least have not changed or abated our faith, and see no reason that we should.

For the thousand industrial difficulties with which Parliament cannot at present deal, a

system of arbitration will suffice. It is premature to attempt to apply compulsory arbitration in its entirety. I am not unmindful of prejudices that exist, and I know that prejudices die hard and slowly.

I suggest, as a practical step to industrial peace, that the Industrial Council machinery should be strengthened and more frankly adopted by the mass of the workers. I have to confess that until recently I was unable to regard these Councils with absorbing admiration. I still think they need overhaul and extensive alteration and repair. But I am prepared to suppress my objections to details, as on the whole they present some valuable potentialities.

From all quarters I hear and feel a sounding wave of discontent with the results of the strike. Workers are weary and disgusted with the abortive folly of it, and angered with the unsatisfied desire for industrial peace in a world distraught with passion and impoverished by war. How sick workers are is known to those of us who mingle with them and know their hopes and fears.

I urge, as a first step to peace, that workers and employers alike should consentiently agree to resort to arbitration in all disputes and that the Industrial Ccuncils should be used as tribunals until a better instrument of settlement can be devised. I am not so

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obsessed with the arbitration idea as to imagine that either workers or employers will accept it in a compulsory form at once.

But all are alike sated with conflict and the call for industrial peace is clamant and imperative. We cannot produce with the strike in our path. We cannot move a step towards a better social order with its burden of pains and penalties upon our backs. I believe the time is ripe for the reopening of this question ; I believe that men are weary enough of the abortive tail-chasing that has occupied their energies and exhausted their patience for the last few years. Workers must find a refuge from the intolerable ; the community must obtain surcease from the unremitting anxiety and terror that the strike and the fear of the strike impose.

I am not at all sure that it is part of my present mission to elaborate what is termed a constructive alternative. In any case I am not in the least disposed to dogmatism. What most thinking workers are vividly cognisant about is that some practical alternative to the strike must be found—and at once—or Britain must succumb to economic pressure and her people perish of dry rot.

It seems possible that the shadow of the strike is as deadly as its actual presence. We have had four railway crises in two years, and

only one of those culminated in an actual strike. We have had as many mining crises since the war concluded, and only two of those resulted in strikes. But the dislocation of industry, at times when steady production was urgently necessary, was little more disastrous in the cases in which strikes took place than in those which were painfully negotiated, with the strike in the background, to settlement without any actual cessation of work.

Nobody knows—perhaps nobody ever will know—how many precious and promising young lives were the price the nation paid for the munitions strikes of the war period ; still less can we calculate the blood tribute that was paid for the organised “ca’ canny” the “stop-in strikes” and the malingering of workers and employers alike in the engineering and kindred trades during the same time.

What is there to show for it all but sore hearts—unless it be the Dead Sea fruit of disappointment and vanity ? A tithe of the squandered wealth and energy would have placed Labour secure in the confidence of the community and established in dignity and influence in the land.

The whole-hog militant trade unionist is the Junker of industrial life. He has no more foresight, no more conscience, no more

prudence than any jack-booted Potsdammer. The workaday world is tired of him, Labour has no use for him. Set up a system of industrial adjustment which finds no place for crazy methods, and his occupation is gone—which, I suspect, is the most terrifying possibility of all. If only the strikes of this year (1920) are taken into account, there is food for serious reflection and equally serious misgiving.

#### ARBITRATION IN INDUSTRY.

One need not be profoundly versed in working class psychology to understand and sympathise with the workers' prejudices against Industrial Arbitration, voluntary or compulsory. It is probable that of every hundred disputes referred to arbitration, 30 per cent. disappoint the workers, 30 per cent. disconcert the employers, and the remainder are compromises which do not entirely please any one but those outside the disputant circle. But the one important merit of arbitration is that at its worst it is infinitely more satisfactory than the strike.

The question is : to what extent it can be applied in the present temper of workers and employers ? While as an individual I should have no fear of the results of a full measure of State Compulsory Arbitration, I am well

enough aware that the present is not the time to attempt or even advocate its application.

Yet it is true that nearly every step to industrial betterment taken during the last six or seven years has been taken by virtue of awards by tribunals which are virtually arbitration courts. Nothing that I can recall during the same period has been gained by the strike that would not have been gained without it. In a sentence, Labour owes nothing to the strike but just resentment for its waste and futility. Surely, the most drastic form of Compulsory Arbitration could hardly present a worse record from the Labour point of view.

The immediate question is, how far existing machinery can be used for at least temporary purposes, pending the formation of something more secure and permanent. It depends, primarily, upon the ability of Organised Labour to take a larger view of political and civic responsibility. Organised Labour's first lesson is to learn to look at industrial life in the light of fact, and to understand itself as it is and not as its flatterers represent it to be.

The bombastic imposture known as the Triple Alliance is shown to be, by the evidences of the events of the past twelve months, a gas-inflated paper bag—and leaky at that. It has neither power nor influence,

money or organisation. It has, obviously, neither a common purpose nor a cohesive faith. Miners will not aid railwaymen, nor railwaymen miners, nor transport workers either ; if the will were present, neither has any ability. The rest of the trade union world is an incoherent mass of sections with exclusive industrial interests, and divergent aspirations which lack both fixity and vision. What they possess is the power to inflict pain and injury upon the community without betterment to themselves. They call this power "the Right to Strike" and affect to regard it as a democratic virtue because they sometimes take a ballot vote upon the question—a vote which invariably demonstrates that not even they are unanimous at home.

Even were the whole trade union mass both unanimous and enthusiastic, it forms but a fraction of the nation. Minority rule cannot ever have the sanction or the tolerance of a free people. The reflex of this resentment by the community of minority arrogance is found to some extent in the reaction of this year's municipal elections. Not even thick-and-thin apologists for the colliers will deny that the coal strike has had a potent effect upon the municipal polls. It may not be an irretrievable disaster, but it is an entry upon the debit side of Labour's

account, and it is one of the things that counts to the bad.

Add to the moral loss the fact that all the strikes of the peace years have not brought a single benefit which would not have been achieved by negotiation and arbitration, and that where arbitration or its equivalent has been resorted to (as in the case of the dockers) incomparably better results have been achieved without loss of money, dignity or honour, and the case is stated conclusively.

### **FIRST PRINCIPLES.**

I am not elaborating a cut-and-dried scheme—we have grown full of “schemes” of late years, and the body, corporate and politic, suffers from a surfeit of schemes, few, if any, of which are very convincing. All I urge is what parliamentarians term a “second reading” debate. A serious discussion of first principles to begin with, and a serious disposition to fit details to the larger requirements of those principles is not an arrogant thing to ask.

To recapitulate :—

1. The strike is useless, effete and obsolete and incapable of conversion into an adequate instrument of betterment.

2. It is costly, wasteful and socially and economically mischievous.
3. It is inimical to production.
4. It is undemocratic and anti-social.
5. It is imperative that Labour must abandon it and find a practical alternative.
6. Industrial Arbitration in some authorised form presents that alternative.

To my fellow trade unionists, and especially to my Labour Party colleagues, I appeal again for a rational and unimpassioned consideration of these suggestions. The Direct Actionist idea which has formed a subject of long and embittered controversy in our movement need not, I think, be revived—I refer, of course, to the Syndicalist delusion which prompts men to imagine that the industrial strike can be effectively or rightfully used to accomplish political ends. I am not discussing that particular form of Syndicalist dementia here. My present concern is with the living beliefs and possibilities of our time.

I can see no bright future for Political Labour with the entangling impedimenta of down tools in our path. I cannot see the possibility of our movement and its apostleship gaining the confidence and respect of our fellow citizens as long as we are encumbered with an industrial policy which can never square with the simplest tenets of social

democracy. As long as a million miners, or half a million railwaymen or engineers or dock labourers, possess the power and the will to falsify social law and evilly entreat the whole mass of our fellow citizens—and we approve of or even acquiesce in their action—it hardly seems that people outside our restricted circle will be wise to trust us with so awful a responsibility as the rule of the greatest Empire of history.

It is better to look it full in the face. It does not take much courage to go to mass or executive meetings of our own people and join some locally and temporarily popular cry. The cult of the jumping cat is no faith for a force that has but one narrow path to march upon to great and good things. Labour must march through moral conquest to dominion—if ever dominion is gained. The strike will never put Labour into power.

I have not written these pages without certain misgivings which most of my co-workers will understand and appreciate. An old Socialist and trade unionist does not take much delight in exposing the naked fragility of what we rather too pompously call Organised Labour. Because I know—as we all know—that there is not much of it and very little real organisation goes to leaven the lump. I can hear of men squealing about paying a few coppers a year for poli-

tical purposes and gaily flinging fifteen or twenty millions of funds and wages away upon a strike that hurts a whole nation and helps nobody—unless in the long run it helps the Capitalist against whom it is said to be directed.

I am convinced that the Labour movement and its honourable cause can never flourish—if indeed it manages to live—under the shadow of the strike. I cannot help thinking sometimes that our political enemies are more conscious of this than we ourselves, and that much of their disapprobation of the “Right to Strike” is open to the suspicion of hypocrisy.

Whatever my parliamentary and trade union official friends may say in public, I know that in a general sense this appeal has their endorsement. I am confident that an open and public endorsement will find a resonant echo amongst the workers who, I know, as my colleagues know, are weary of crawling in the mud and eating the bread of bitterness; who only wait a call to an upstanding fight on a firmer and more honourable battlefield.

Straws, bradawls, “dust in the balance” may symbolise principles—of a sort, but nothing worth the suffering and demoralisation which is imposed by the “fight on the belly” and its unreasoning brutality. It is

## **STOP THE STRIKE !**

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keeping us all back. It is the moral cripple, not the great heart filled with the spirit of high endeavour that needs a crutch to hobble upon. Labour needs a keener weapon and a surer faith than " Down Tools."







